



**Working Paper No. 45**

**DEMOCRATS WITH ADJECTIVES:  
LINKING DIRECT AND INDIRECT  
MEASURES OF DEMOCRATIC  
SUPPORT**

by Andreas Schedler and Rodolfo Sarsfield

**A comparative series of national public  
attitude surveys on democracy, markets  
and civil society in Africa.**



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## AFROBAROMETER WORKING PAPERS

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by Andreas Schedler and Rodolfo Sarsfield

**November 2004**

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## Introduction

Over the past three decades, the worldwide spread of democratic regimes has reinvigorated scholarly interest in mass support for democracy. According to broad strands of literature, a popular “commitment to democratic values, and support for a democratic system, are necessary conditions for the consolidation” of democratic governance (Fuchs 1999: 127).<sup>1</sup> In principle, under appropriate qualifications (which would specify what types and levels of popular support affect chances of regime survival to what extent and under which conditions) we may accept the causal relevance of citizen attitudes towards democracy.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of the present paper, though, is not to evaluate causal claims, but to address a logically prior problem: the problem of measuring mass support for democracy.<sup>3</sup>

As many authors have noted, standard questionnaire items that inquire in a direct and generic fashion into respondents’ regime preferences suffer from fundamental problems of validity. As long as we do not know what conceptions of democracy people embrace and what democratic values they cherish, their responses remain almost unintelligible. Their meaning and their relevance remain very much open to doubt. Yet, as we all understand, “if support for democracy is not validly measured we may never be able to detect how important this support is to the process of democratization” (Miller, *et al.*, 1997: 186).

The present paper traces a methodological pathway that promises to lead us out of the foggy zone of comparative research on democratic support. Instead of heeding the advice of some and trashing standard questions on democratic support, it proposes to link these direct and abstract questions in systematic ways with more indirect and concrete questions on essential components of liberal democracy. This should allow us, we argue, to go well beyond common dichotomies of “democratic” versus “authoritarian” citizens. Reading direct and indirect questions on democratic support in conjunction should permit us to identify complex and possibly inconsistent configurations of attitudes. Specifically, we are open to the possibility of detecting “diminished subtypes” of democratic supporters – “democrats with adjectives” – who are supportive of democracy in the abstract, while hostile to some of the essentials principles or institutions of liberal democracy in particular.

In the following, after reviewing the extant literature on democratic support, we will explain our idea of “democrats with adjectives” in some detail. In continuation, we illustrate its fruitfulness through a cluster analysis of illiberal attitudes and democratic support on the basis of Mexico’s major representative survey on political attitudes, the 2003 National Survey on Political Culture (ENCUP).

## The Elusive Meaning of Democratic Support

Almost all contemporary comparative public opinion surveys that cover the developing world include at least one direct, albeit generic, question designed to measure citizen support for democracy. These questions are direct insofar as they make explicit use of the term “democracy”; they are generic insofar as they introduce the abstract concept without specifying any of its concrete attributes. Their precise formulations vary. Surveys may frame democracy as a “political regime,” “form of government,” or “political system”; they may invite respondents to evaluate it in absolute or relative terms; and they may ask for comparisons with “dictatorship,” “authoritarian government,” specified or unspecified “previous” regimes, or more broadly, with “any other form of government.”<sup>4</sup>

Authors varyingly refer to this family of survey questions as registering “overt” support for democracy (Inglehart, 2003), “idealist” support of democracy (Rose, *et al.*, 1998), “preferences for democracy” (Sarsfield, 2003), attitudes towards “democracy as an ideal form of government” (Klingemann, 2003), or just “support for democracy” without further qualifications (Lagos, 2003b). Regardless of their differences in detail, all these questionnaire items suffer from four fundamental problems that put their validity into question.

### ***Interviewer Effects***

Today, as democracy has turned into a worldwide value, paying “lip service to democracy” has become an “almost universal” practice (Inglehart, 2003: 51). Under the pressure of recognized social values, respondents may therefore “seek to give what they perceive the ‘right’ answer to the interviewer” (Seligson, 2004: 12). Instead of identifying citizens who embrace the ideals of liberal democracy, our standard questions on “democratic support” may do no more than registering “questionnaire democrats” who deliver politically correct answers to noncommittal stimuli.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Vacuous Conceptions of Democracy***

The problem with democracy’s almost universal acceptance as an abstract value is not that people falsify their preferences for democracy. The problem is that their public “preferences for democracy” may be devoid of any concrete content. Respondents may understand that democracy is a good thing, something we aspire to, without being able to specify what exactly it is supposed to represent.<sup>6</sup>

All over the world, from Austria to Argentina, from Angola to Azerbaijan, across regime types, cultures, and continents, generic survey questions on democratic support earn overwhelming levels of assent. According to the 1999-2000 wave of the World Values Survey, they oscillated between a minimum of 62 percent in Russia and a maximum of 99 percent in Albania (Inglehart, 2003; Klingemann, 1999). These almost unanimous levels of support suggest that democracy may indeed be a societal valence issue that works similar to concepts like success and happiness in the personal realm, concepts that designate something valuable without fixing its concrete content.

Non-responses to open-ended questions about the meaning of democracy, too, hint at a possible conceptual emptiness of democracy. Such open-ended questions ask citizens to articulate abstract conceptions of democracy, albeit in rudimentary ways. “Don’t know” and “No response” (DK/NR) responses indicate the difficulties respondents may face in doing so. In the first wave of the Afrobarometer, for instance, about one fifth of respondents (23 percent) did not volunteer any meaning of democracy (Bratton, 2002: 3). In Mexico’s 2003 National Survey on Political Culture, which we will analyze more closely below, when confronted with an open-ended question about “the difference between a democratic and a non-democratic government,” over 60 percent of respondents were unable or unwilling to produce an answer. High levels of non-response suggest that our standard questions about abstract preferences for democracy may register widespread “non-attitudes” (Converse, 1970) – expressions of “opinions that people had not previously held or considered before being asked to voice an opinion by survey” (Mishler and Rose, 2001: 305).

### ***Competing Conceptions of Democracy***

When asked about the meaning of democracy in an explorative interview in early 2004, a Mexican police officer ascertained – with slight irritation about being asked a rather stupid and self-evident question – that democracy means “coming ever closer to God” – a movement that would involve, in the first place, combating crime and drug addiction (Calixto, 2004: 2). In her mind, then, democracy seemed synonymous with the realization of a religious conception of the good life, with the establishment of a well-ordered society bowing to the commands of God. Such a conception of democracy may strike us as idiosyncratic. Within the analytical frames of political science, democracy is supposed to mean something more specific. It is not meant to work as an empty conceptual container to be filled at pleasure with good wishes for societal progress and wellbeing.

Within the liberal-democratic consensus that has taken hold in the discipline over the past two decades, democracy is defined by a quite narrow core of political institutions. At a minimum, democracy demands multiparty competition (regular, inclusive, competitive, and fair elections) and the rule of law (political and civil liberties as well as constitutional limits on the exercise of power). Students of comparative



politics conventionally signal their conformity with this smallest common denominator of liberal-democratic procedures by referring to the famous eight institutional guarantees of democratic governance Robert Dahl stipulates on page 3 of his *Polyarchy* (1971).

But while we may welcome normative and conceptual convergences in the academic world, seemingly strange and irritating conceptions of democracy, as put forward by our Mexican police officer, should remind us that in the so-called real world of politics, democracy continues to be an “essentially contested concept” (Gallie, 1956). Rather than shared, clear, and fixed, its meaning is often vague, shifting, and controversial. As William Keech laconically asserted: “Every literate adult can use the word ‘democracy’ correctly in a sentence, but there is no consensus about its meaning, and there probably never will be” (2004: 1).

Standard questions on democratic support pretend, at least for a moment, such conceptual controversies do not exist anymore. Making “heroic assumptions” (Gerring, 2004: 348) about the cross-national comparability of democratic ideas, they remain indeterminate as they leave respondents free to attach concrete meanings, no matter which, to the notion of democracy. However, if we do not know what responses mean since democracy “can be bent to mean what people want it to mean” (Bratton, 2002: 6), we do not know what questions measure and the “essence of validity is lost” (Canache, *et al.*, 2001: 525).<sup>7</sup>

For how can we be sure whether it is liberal democracy respondents are supporting, rather than some competing and possibly incompatible notion of democracy? The problem is relatively minor if we feel safe to assume that respondents share a core of basic liberal-democratic principles, such as the rule of law, free and fair elections, and the constitutional protection of individual rights. In certain contexts, it may indeed be “hardly conceivable that reasonable individuals can oppose such principles” (Fuchs, 1999: 129). Even in such benign situations of normative convergence and sharing of common ground, citizens may still cherish different democratic ideals. Their conceptual divergences, however, are circumscribed to democracy’s “supplementary elements” (Fuchs, 1999: 125).

New democracies almost invariably fail to provide such a context of consent. Rather than embracing a common set of liberal-democratic principles, citizens may flirt with authoritarian alternatives, entertain vague ideas of democracy that lack any identifiable core, or harbour notions of democracy whose core principles are incompatible with liberal-democratic ideals. If our studies of democratic support are to make sense, they have to make sense of the conflicting conceptions of democracy that citizens may entertain. If democracy would mean roughly the same to most people across countries and cultures (as well as within countries and cultures), we might well assume that a single question, held constant across time and space, may achieve rough equivalence of meaning. Yet, if the core meaning of the concept varies in significant ways across cases, trying to capture it through “a single standard, assumed to have cross-national validity by virtue of its identity properties” (Przeworski and Teune, 1973: 124) is bound to produce problems of cross-national as well as interpersonal comparability.

### ***Conflicting Values***

Our conceptions of democracy are not value-free. They are rooted in our normative commitments. Yet the coupling between political concepts and social norms may be relatively loose. Individuals may support fundamental principles of liberal-democratic politics at the same time that they reject some of its constitutive values. For instance, as James Gibson and his collaborators have shown in numerous studies, “a clear disjuncture” may exist “between levels of support for democracy and political tolerance.” Citizens who accept the institutional framework of electoral democracy “are not necessarily tolerant of their political enemies” (Gibson, 1996: 7).<sup>8</sup> Social attitudes like tolerance towards minority groups may therefore serve as better tests of democratic convictions than overt preferences for democracy (see also Inglehart, 2003: 54).

While conscious of the first two problems – the possible inflation of “democratic support” that may result both from social desirability as well as from the vague valuation of democracy without substantive contours – the present paper addresses the latter two, i.e., the threats competing democratic conceptions and social values pose to the validity of our conventional measures of democratic support.

### **Measuring Conceptions of Democracy**

The polysemous nature of democracy is not big news to either theoretical or empirical approaches to democracy. In political philosophy, discussions of competing “models of democracy” (Held, 1987) have a long and venerable pedigree. Similarly, comparative political scientists have been conscious of existing varieties of democratic ideas. They have produced rich, in-depth studies of the variegated and multi-faceted conceptions of democracy that citizens embrace in distant places like Argentina (Powers, 2001) and Senegal (Schaffer, 1998). Students of comparative public opinion, too, have shown acute awareness of democracy’s conceptual openness. The literature on democratic support is dotted with statements of caution, readily admitting that “democracy can mean all things to all people” (Bratton, 2002: 6).<sup>9</sup>

Researchers thus tend to be conscious of the fact that we cannot *assume* the equivalence of meaning in measures of democratic support, but must *establish* it empirically. In consequence, numerous studies have gone beyond posing direct questions about preferences for democracy. They have taken three different routes in order to capture the broad varieties of democratic ideas and values that mass publics may hold. Each of the three strategies has its distinctive strengths and weaknesses. Since they complement each other in useful ways, some scholars have combined at least two of them in their research designs (see, e.g., Bratton, 2004; and Miller, *et al.*, 1997).

### ***Unconstrained Self-Definition***

Some surveys let citizens speak for themselves. Without prejudging their responses, they ask them in open-ended questions what comes to their mind when they hear the word democracy (see, e.g., Ai Camp, 2001: 17; Bratton, 2004: 66–70; Miller, *et al.*, 1997: 164–76; and Mattes and Thiel, 1998). In part, the fruitfulness of open-ended questions depends on their precise wording. Formulations that suggest the answer is open and contested seem to work better than more exam-like formulations that seem to imply correct answers exist (and thus possibly elicit higher levels of non-response).<sup>10</sup> More importantly, the usefulness of open-ended questions crucially depends on the analytical framing and methodological transparency of the posterior coding process. In some cases, like Mexico’s second National Survey on Political Culture, coders seem to compete with respondents in terms of confusion and opaqueness.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Constrained Self-Definition***

Other surveys invite respondents to delineate the conceptual core of democracy by scaling generic attributes (from a closed list) according to the degree to which they consider them to be “essential” to democracy. Such lists may be limited to elements essential to liberal democracy, like political rights, civil liberties, the rule of law, universal suffrage, and multiparty competitions (see Westle, 2003). Or they may include items that tap alternative conceptions of democracy. For instance, intending to uncover substantive notions of democracy, the Afrobarometer asks people whether they consider socio-economic goals like “equality in education” and “jobs for everyone” as essential features of democracy (see Bratton, 2004: 69). In a similar vein, in order to reconstruct popular ideas of democracy, Alejandro Moreno analyzes the responses citizens give when asked to identify “the main task of democracy” among four options: holding elections, protecting minorities, fighting crime, and redistributing wealth (Moreno, 2001: 42–7). Naturally, closed questions truncate the range of democratic ideas respondents are able to express. Yet, in contrast to open questions, they allow us to examine relations between different dimensions of democracy – relations citizens themselves may, or may not, be aware of.

### ***Multiple Indirect Measures***

Numerous surveys ask, again on the basis of closed questions, whether respondents agree or disagree with statements that touch upon dimensions survey researchers themselves consider to be essential to liberal democracy. The corresponding sets of items often include institutions as well as principles. For example, Miller, Hesli, and Reisinger ask for attitudes towards political compromise, delegation of decision-making to “competent leaders,” the acceptance of dissidence, and minority rights (1997: 176–84). Gibson and Duch create their scale of democratic values by measuring attitudes towards competitive elections, media independence, individual liberty, political rights, and support for dissent (1996: 320–1). UNDP, in its recent report on the state of Latin American democracies, inquires, among other things, into the importance citizens grant to congress, political parties, independent media, and constitutional restraints on power (2004: 137).

### **Assumptions of Consensus and Consistency**

In principle, the multi-faceted inquiries students of comparative public opinion have conducted on popular conceptions of democracy should allow us to fill the conceptual as well as normative vacuum left open by standard questions on democratic support. They should allow us to survey the conceptual and normative ground in which abstract preferences for democracy are anchored. Yet even if we know in principle that citizens’ revealed preferences for democracy may flow out a broad range of ideas and values, in practice their empirical examination tends to run into three enduring obstacles: the assumption of common sense (despite better knowledge), the practice of aggregation (despite access to individual data), and the assumption of individual consistency (despite irritating evidence to the contrary).

### ***The Assumption of Common Sense***

Even if they readily acknowledge plural conceptions of democracy, both producers and consumers of survey research tend to remain overly impressed by average levels of overt support for democracy, without further clarification of underlying democratic notions and values. Instead of taking the possibility seriously that democracy may “mean different things to different groups in society” (Rose, *et al.*, 1998: 10), they succumb to the temptation to ignore democracy’s semantic openness. Instead, they are guided by the assumption that democracy is a common-sensical affair, a matter of shared and uncontested meaning. Knowledge about competing democratic ideas and ideals may motivate notes of caution. Yet in practice, data interpretation is guided by the assumption that respondents associate similar meanings with the notion of democracy.

### ***Practice of Aggregation***

The widespread practice of working with aggregate data, even where individual-level data are available, often goes hand in hand with the assumption of shared meaning. Based on the premise of common sense, analysts read aggregate levels of (what looks like) “popular support for democracy” in given countries as transparent measures of regime legitimacy. Yet, unless the assumption of shared democratic ideas and ideals holds, using aggregate national-level data of overt democratic support in the search for “coherent cross-cultural differences” (Inglehart, 2000: 82) is bound to yield descriptive inferences of doubtful meaning and relevance. As Adam Przeworski observed poignantly, uncounted “pages of academic journals are filled with percentages of Americans, Spaniards, Poles, or Kazakhs saying that they like or do not like democracy” (Przeworski, 2003: 119). Students of comparative politics take inferential leaps of faith when they read such raw percentages, be it as heralds of democratic trouble or “harbingers of democratic stability” (*ibid.*).<sup>12</sup>

In principle, then, our sensitivity to competing conceptions of democracy seems well-developed. Yet, as we proceed to translate it into concrete practices of data processing and interpretation, it tends to get diluted in the muddy waters of nationwide percentages of simple and single measures of democratic support. It gets lost in translation.

### ***The Assumption of Individual Consistency***

No less than the daring assumption of common sense, the untested assumption of individual consistency has put severe limitations on the empirical study of variations in democratic ideas and ideals that lie beneath overt declarations of democratic support. Yet we have little reason to believe, without further proof, that individual citizens tend to entertain consistent ideological stances towards democracy and authoritarianism.

Comparative public opinion surveys routinely produce aggregate outcomes that look frankly contradictory. How is it that in 1998 only 12 percent of South Korean citizens thought that authoritarianism was “sometimes” preferable to democracy, while 43 percent agreed that “Korea still works better under a dictatorship” (Chu, Diamond, and Shin, 2001: 125 and 127)? How can we make sense of the fact that, in numerous countries all over the world, overwhelming majorities of citizens hold “a democratic system” to be a fine way of governing their countries, while simultaneously solid majorities are attracted to the idea of “having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections” (see Inglehart, 2003: 52–3)?

In part, such blatant contradictions may result from measurement errors. Overall, however, rather than artificial outcomes of deficient survey techniques, they seem to be genuine. As Timothy Power stated in an able synthesis of time-honoured psychological insights, citizens’ contradictory attitudes may very well be “not a problem of our surveys, but a problem of our minds. By nature, we human beings are contradictory.”<sup>13</sup>

In principle, opinion surveys that use multiple questions to measure citizen attitudes towards democracy open the door to systematic explorations of respondents’ potential ideological inconsistencies. Unfortunately, though, most studies miss that chance when they reduce their multiple measures to one-dimensional indicators.

### ***One-Dimensional Indicators***

As mentioned above, numerous opinion polls contain small batteries of items designed to remedy the semantic indeterminacy of our standard questions on democratic support. Some instruments intend to measure public support for conflicting conceptions of democracy. The Afrobarometer, in particular, taps substantive notions of democracy that associate democracy with policy outcomes like social equality, economic progress, and peace, as opposed to procedural notions that equate democracy with individual rights and representative institutions (see, e.g., Bratton, 2004: 69). Most surveys, though, do not pretend to capture existing varieties of democratic thought. Rather than mapping conflicting ideas of democracy, they wish to measure more narrowly the extent to which prevailing ideas and ideals conflict with liberal conceptions of democracy. Accordingly, the survey items they use to measure citizen support for democratic principles and institutions do not cover the whole range of principles and institutions people may associate with democracy. They only cover those principles and institutions we commonly associate with liberal democracy, such as competitive elections, political parties, legislative assemblies, independent media, the rule of law, checks and balances, dissidence and opposition, deliberation and accountability, or individual rights and liberties.<sup>14</sup>

Yet, even if they use multiple indicators to capture democratic support, authors usually end up aligning respondents along one single dimension: their attitudinal proximity to liberal-democratic norms. They read the various measures as essentially tapping one single dimension: degrees of individual support for liberal democracy. Even the innovative and sophisticated analysis of democratic attitudes presented by UNDP in its recent report on the state of democracy in Latin America (2004) classifies citizens along a one-dimensional continuum, accommodating “democrats” and “non-democrats” at its extremes, and “ambivalent” citizens in the middle.

In order to reduce multiple measures to one “summary indicator of support for democratic values” (Gibson and Duch, 1993: 321), some authors employ factor analysis, while others construct additive aggregate measures.<sup>15</sup> Yet, whatever the specific statistical technique set on march, the generation of single aggregate indicators of liberal-democratic support rests upon two strong premises: 1) it assumes that liberal democracy is a one-dimensional concept; and 2) it assumes that individual citizens either embrace or reject liberal democracy in consistent ways. Whether liberal democracy represents a one- or multi-dimensional idea is open to debate. Yet, following Robert Dahl (1971), many scholars of comparative politics tend to embrace the idea that democracy involves at least two fundamental dimensions (participation and contestation).<sup>16</sup> Whether, and to what extent, individual citizens are ideologically coherent is an empirical question, not a conceptual one. However, at least since Philip Converse’s famous piece on “the nature of belief systems in mass publics” (1964), the burden of proof lies with those who decide to assume individual consistency (see also Miller, *et al.*, 1997: 159–60).

### **Democrats with Adjectives**

In the comparative study of democratization, scholars have been witnessing the emergence of political regimes that fulfill the minimum conditions of electoral democracy, but lack essential attributes of liberal democracy. In order to capture such deviations from normative ideals, authors have been attaching distinctive adjectives to the multi-faceted “diminished subtypes” of democracy that they observe (see Collier and Levitsky, 1997). The specific labels scholars choose to describe such “democracies with adjectives” (*ibid.*) are meant to draw attention to specific structural deficits and weaknesses. For example, “delegative” democracies lack checks and balances (O’Donnell, 1994), “illiberal” democracies fail to uphold the rule of law (Zakaria, 2003), and “clientelist” democracies are weak on programmatic party politics (Kitschelt, 2000).

The prolific creation of “diminished subtypes” of democracies has been denounced by some as excessive and arbitrary, as driven more by the logic of academic marketing than by standards of conceptual quality, normative appropriateness, and empirical precision (see Armory and Schamis, 2004). Nevertheless, despite clear excesses, overall the creation of well-crafted “diminished subtypes” of democracies has been a fruitful enterprise that has served its original purpose of analytic differentiation well.

The comparative study of democratic support seems to face similar problems of inconsistent and deficient cases. While students of regime change have been struggling to make sense of “hybrid regimes” (Diamond, 2002), we students of public opinion have to make sense of “hybrid citizens.” Given these broad analogies, the time seems ripe to pass from a discussion of “democracies with adjectives” to a discussion of “democrats with adjectives.” In the study of democracy, we seem to miss a lot of “differences that make a difference” (Bateson, 1972) if we put the unifying label of democracy (without adjectives) on the existing variety of democratic regimes. Similarly, we seem to miss a lot if we describe all individuals as “democrats” without further qualifications merely if they profess a generic “preference” for democracy in response to direct survey questions.

Granted, the generic idea of “mixed” citizens is not new. Admitting the possibility of inconsistent attitudes is not equivalent, however, to locating citizens in the middle range of a normative continuum. The notion of normative contradictions is more unsettling than the idea of attitudinal gradations or balances, such as the benign equilibrium between passive deference and critical participation that Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba identified as the distinguishing mark of a “civic culture” (1963).

Shedding the assumption of individual coherence, some authors have explored bivariate relations between citizens’ generic preferences for democracy and other measures of support for democratic ideas and institutions on the basis of individual-level data. Michael Bratton, for instance, cross-tabulated support for democracy with the rejection of authoritarian rule (military dictatorship, personal dictatorship, one-party

rule, and traditional rule). He found that almost one-third of respondents said they preferred democracy, but failed to consistently reject all forms of authoritarian rule. Contrasting with “committed democrats” who reject all four variants of authoritarianism, such “proto-democrats” seem to express “nostalgic feelings for more forceful forms of rule” (Bratton, 2002: 9).

In a similar manner, on the basis of Latinobarometer data, Rodolfo Sarsfield contrasted preferences for democratic government with demands for authoritarian leadership styles, as indicated by sympathies for strong-hand government (“mano dura”). He found that about two fifths of respondents professed to prefer democracy over authoritarianism, but still endorsed heavy-handed forms of governance. This led him to distinguish “liberal” democrats, whose attitudes look consistent with normative prescriptions of liberal-democratic theory, from “illiberal” democrats, whose attitudes seem to contradict them (Sarsfield 2003: 169–76).

These are promising beginnings, even if they are still very much limited by their bivariate designs. If we allow for ideological inconsistency, but wish to establish citizens’ attitudinal profiles in more complex and nuanced ways, we have to advance toward multivariate examinations of their democratic ideas and ideals. With few exceptions, public opinion surveys are ill-designed to capture citizen attitudes towards democratic ideas and institutions. However, even if much is to be improved in the realm of data collection, existing datasets do contain vast amounts of useful data that are left under-explored and understudied. If we wish to deepen our knowledge about citizens’ democratic ideas and ideals, the most urgent task is not to collect fresh data, but to re-analyze available data in fresh ways.

In the empirical part of this paper which follows, we will explore patterns of association between generic support for democracy, on the one hand, and various indicators of democratic liberalism, on the other, on the basis of a cluster analysis of the 2003 Mexican National Survey on Political Culture (ENCUP). We chose to work with this survey for pragmatic reasons – the public availability of data – as well as for reasons of relevance – ENCUP represents Mexico’s major representative survey in the field of political culture. The survey should, therefore, serve as the basis for an interesting “case study” conceived as “an intense study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units” (Gerring, 2004: 342). At the same time, it perfectly illustrates our point about the potential gains from improving data analysis, even under conditions of imperfect data collection. Given its limitations of design, the Mexican survey does not allow us to study attitudes towards democratic institutions, nor does it permit us to look beyond liberal values and reconstruct citizens’ commitment to alternative strands of normative democratic theory (like participatory, substantive, republican or deliberative democracy). Still, we believe that, despite the relative narrowness of the survey data we use, our analysis allows us to illuminate them in new and interesting ways.

### **Illiberal Democrats**

Extending the discussion of “diminished subtypes” of democratic regimes to the study of “diminished subtypes” of democratic citizens runs the risk of inviting facile exercises of negative labeling. Students of public opinion may be tempted to put cheap labels on their political adversaries, denouncing citizens who do not share their ideology. Or they may be tempted to place unrealistic demands on citizens, stigmatizing those who do not live up to ethereal ideals of civic virtue. Accordingly, at the moment of conceptualizing and describing “democrats with adjectives,” we must avoid deriving our analytical categories from either trivializing or idealizing normative standards. The “democratic deficits” we diagnose must constitute clear deviations from core principles of liberal democracy.

The pretension to identify “diminished subtypes” of democrats through the use of public opinion surveys faces one grave initial objection. *A priori*, it is not at all clear whether a democratic political regime makes *attitudinal* demands on its citizens. Without doubt, liberal democracy places certain *behavioral*

demands on citizens. It demands that citizens act “in a way that demonstrates an acceptance of ‘the essentials of a liberal democratic regime’” (Quong, 2004: 318). At a minimum, the practical acceptance of democratic fundamentals involves the renunciation of violence, as well as the disposition to respect the rights and liberties of others in practice. Yet, does the democratic demand to respect the basic rules of the political game extend from actions to attitudes? Strictly speaking, it does not.

In principle, freedom of opinion protects anti-democratic opinions as well as democratic convictions (even if some democracies prohibit the public incitation to violence and democratic subversion). However, even if political attitudes do not translate into political action in any immediate and lineal fashion, popular support for non-democratic values and institutions is likely to affect the political process, sooner or later, in one way or the other. Citizens who fail to respect the rights of others (at a normative level) are likely to support policies that violate the rights of others (at a practical level). In extreme cases, they may end up voting autocrats into positions of power. In less dramatic situations, they may tolerate and even encourage the bending and breaking of constitutional rules, the invasion of minority rights, the manipulation of mass media, or the executive encroachment of judicial autonomy. Democratic polities thus have good reasons to be concerned about the extent to which citizen attitudes are consistent with the catalogue of liberal-democratic core principles.

In the present paper, through our analysis of the Mexican ENCUP 2003 data, we wish to substantiate the idea of “democrats with adjectives” by examining the extent to which overt supporters of democracy hold illiberal attitudes. Of course, when defining the contours of “illiberal democrats,” we must take core values of democratic liberalism as our normative referent. Controversial issues of economic or cultural liberalism have no place in a discussion of “diminished subtypes” of democratic citizens. They are the stuff of normal policy debate within democratic regimes. In no way do they form part of the minimal package of normative obligations loyal citizens may be expected to fulfill in a democratic system.

A handful of the questions in the Mexican Survey on Political Culture are designed to measure liberal-democratic orientations in this narrow sense. Basically, these questions tap three essential elements of democratic liberalism: freedom of opinion, freedom of association, and political equality (respect for the rights to political participation of minority groups). Within this group of candidates for inclusion in our analysis, we selected those that seemed the most valid indicators of liberal core principles (using correlation and factor analysis, not reported here, to confirm their validity, as well as to exclude redundant measures.

### **Empirical Indicators**

In order to explore configurations of democratic support and liberal attitudes among mass publics, we use data from the second Mexican National Survey on Political Culture (N = 4850), a representative nationwide survey commissioned by the Mexican government to “systematically diagnose the particular traits of the political culture prevalent in the country” (SEGOB, 2003: 1). The survey, commonly referred to as ENCUP (after its Spanish initials), was conducted in February 2003. It included 74 questions covering various dimensions of political culture, such as political interest, political knowledge, political participation, policy positions, and personal and institutional trust. We select one of its questions as our measure of generic democratic support, and five others as measures of liberal attitudes (for original survey wordings, see Table 1).<sup>17</sup>

**Table 1: Questionnaire Items: Direct and Indirect Support for Liberal Democracy**

#	Dimension	Name	Question	Original Wording	Coding
28	Direct support for democracy	Democracy versus dictatorship	“What do you think is better for the country: A democracy that respects the rights of all persons or a dictatorship that guarantees economic progress even without respecting the rights of all persons.”	“¿Qué cree usted que es mejor para el país? Una democracia que respete los derechos de todas las personas. Una dictadura que asegure el avance económico, aunque no respete el derecho de todas las personas.”	(1) Dictatorship. (2) Neither nor. (3) Democracy.
7-8	Freedom of organization	Freedom of organization	“The government should intervene in decisions concerning one’s wishes to associate with other persons?”	“Por lo que usted piensa, ¿el gobierno debería o no intervenir en las decisiones con respecto a si uno quiere organizarse con otras personas.”	(1) Government should intervene, (2) intervene in part, (3) should not intervene.
33-1	Freedom of expression	Freedom of expression	“Would you be willing to sacrifice freedom of expression in exchange for a life without economic pressures?”	“¿Estaría dispuesto a sacrificar la libertad de expresión a cambio de vivir sin presiones económicas?”	(1) Yes. (2) In part. (3) No.
56	Freedom of expression	Pluralism of opinion in TV	“Would you permit a person to get on television who will be saying things that contradict your way of thinking?”	“¿Estaría de acuerdo o en desacuerdo en que se permitiera salir en televisión a una persona que va a decir cosas que están en contra de su forma de pensar?”	(1) No. (2) In part. (3) Yes.
18-10	Political equality	Indigenous participation	“In your opinion, from the list I will be reading you, who should participate in politics and who not: Indigenous people?”	“De la lista que le voy a leer, en su opinión, dígame ¿Quiénes si deberían participar en la política y quienes no? Los indígenas.”	(1) No. (2) In part. (3) Yes.
18-11	Political equality	Gay participation	“In your opinion, from the list I will be reading you, who should participate in politics and who not: Homosexual persons?”	“De la lista que le voy a leer, en su opinión, dígame ¿Quiénes si deberían participar en la política y quienes no? Los homosexuales.”	(1) No. (2) In part. (3) Yes.



## Democratic Support

According to subsequent waves of Latinobarometer surveys since 1995, Mexican citizens have been displaying medium levels of democratic support by regional standards. Table 2 shows Latin American national averages in 2003 for the Globalbarometer / Latinobarometer standard item on regime preferences. In addition, the table includes national averages for a question about the acceptability of “non-democratic government, if it solves economic problems.” With respect to the first item, in 2003, a slight majority of Mexican respondents declared a preference for democracy, exactly coincident with the regional mean (53 percent). Mexico seems somewhat less polarized than other countries, though, with levels of indifference lying slightly above and sympathies for authoritarian solutions slightly below the regional average. By comparison, Mexican responses to the second item concerning evaluations of the trade-off between democracy and economic efficiency look worse than the regional average. In 2003, almost two-thirds of Mexican conceded priority to economic performance over democratic governance (63 percent), more than 10 points above the regional mean (52 percent).

**Table 2: Democratic Support in Latin America, 2003**

	Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government	For people like me, it does not matter whether we have a democratic or nondemocratic regime	Under some circumstances, an authoritarian government may be preferable to a democratic one	I wouldn't mind a non-democratic government if it resolves economic problems*
Argentina	68	12	18	46
Bolivia	50	24	22	55
Brazil	35	36	19	65
Chile	51	32	14	52
Colombia	46	23	14	51
Costa Rica	77	11	7	32
Ecuador	46	19	34	44
El Salvador	45	27	11	55
Guatemala	33	24	10	37
Honduras	55	23	13	53
<b>Mexico</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>63</b>
Nicaragua	51	26	10	71
Panama	51	20	18	52
Paraguay	40	16	44	76
Peru	52	23	20	57
Uruguay	78	10	9	36
Venezuela	67	13	15	49
Latin America	53	n.a.	n.a.	52

Source: Latinobarometer ([www.latinobarometro.org](http://www.latinobarometro.org)), accessed 24 September 2004.

\*Percentages of valid answers, sum of respondents who “agree” and “agree very much” to the following statement: “I wouldn't mind if a non-democratic government would come to power if it were able to resolve our economic problems.”

These and similar data have given rise to widespread complaints about “democratic deficits” in Mexico’s political culture (echoing wider complaints about the “limited” “democratic loyalty” of Latin American citizens.)<sup>18</sup> Numerous authors have emphasized the apparent ambiguity of Mexican citizens towards democratic principles and institutions. For instance, Roderic Ai Camp found that Mexicans entertain “contradictory values with respect to democracy” (1999: 2), while Enrique Alduncin concluded his recent

review of democratic ideas and ideals among the Mexican public with a classical metaphor of ambiguity: the glass of democratic culture, he asserted, is “half-full” (2002: 3).<sup>19</sup>

ENCUP 2003 contains one item that comes close to generic standard questions on overt support for democracy. It asks respondents what they think is “better for the country: a democracy that respects the rights of all persons; or a dictatorship that guarantees economic progress.” In contrast to standard questions on democratic support, the survey thus concretizes the notion of democracy (its liberal dimension of individual rights); and it specifies the circumstances under which respondents may deem authoritarian rule to be justifiable (the achievement of economic progress). Considering the explicit emphasis the item puts on individual rights as well as the explicit trade-off it poses against economic performance, responses supportive of democracy should reflect stronger commitments to liberal-democratic governance than the vague “preferences for democracy” registered by more generic questionnaire items.<sup>20</sup>

Given their differences in wording, we should not expect ENCUP 2003 to reveal identical levels of “democratic support” as Latinobarometer 2003. As it turns out, over two-thirds of all respondents (67.9 percent) said they would prefer democratic rights to dictatorial welfare. Since more than one-fifth of interviewees failed to provide valid answers (21.4 percent), this amounts to an astonishing level of agreement of 84.2 percent of all valid responses (see Table 3).<sup>21</sup> The level of non-responses merits attention, though. It suggests that many respondents may have felt uncomfortable with the artificial alternative presented by ENCUP that associates authoritarianism with economic efficiency and (albeit in an implicit manner) democracy with economic failure. They may have refused to choose among “two evils,” dictatorship without individual rights and democracy without economic growth. As it appears, forced to give “simplistic answers to what are perceived as simplistic questions” (Gibson, 1996: 11) they took refuge in essentially uninterpretable DK/NR responses.

Despite the interrogation signs introduced by non-responses, these figures seem to speak of a solid, even heroic, support of democracy among the Mexican public. In a country of deep and widespread poverty, an overwhelming majority of citizens refuses to accept the Faustian pact of renouncing democratic liberties in the name of economic welfare. Yet even before we proceed to examine levels of consistency between democratic support and liberal values, we wish to insert, from the outset, a note of caution.

When asked in another open-ended question about “the difference between a democratic and a non-democratic government,” over 60 percent of respondents either declared that none existed (10.9 percent), or were unable or unwilling to name any (52.7 percent). Ironically, response patterns do not differ dramatically among those who side with democracy (in response to the item that postulates a trade-off between democratic rights and prosperity) and those who do not. Among professed democrats, a similar percentage spontaneously asserts that democracies are no different from non-democracies (8.7 percent), while over two-fifths take cover in the black box of DK/NR responses (45.1 percent).<sup>22</sup> As these figures suggest, more than half of Mexico’s overt supporters of democracy are firmly committed to a loose idea of democracy. They embrace democracy as an empty ideal.

### ***Freedom of Association***

To establish citizen attitudes towards freedom of organization, we selected an ENCUP item that asks whether “the government should intervene in decisions that concern one’s wishes to associate with other persons.” The item pertains to a larger set of questions that asks about the realms of legitimate governmental interference. The list of potential issues subject to political decision-making is broad and diverse: school curricula, informal commerce, daylight savings time, the access to fire arms, television programming, and domestic violence. These questions seem to touch upon distinctive dimensions of liberalism, most of them unrelated to democratic core principles. From this somewhat disorderly shopping list, we selected the question that inquires into the desirability of governmental interference into

associational decisions. Arguably, this item touches upon a core value of political liberalism (the freedom of organization), rather than measuring a contingent expression of political liberalism (the eventual desire to protect a specific private activity from governmental interference). As Table 3 shows, more than one-third of respondents declared themselves in favor of governmental interference into citizens' associational desires (37.7 percent). A solid majority objected (57.7 percent).

**Table 3: Support for Democracy and Liberal Values, Mexico 2003**  
(percentage of valid answers)

	1 <i>Illiberal</i>	2 <i>Ambiguous</i>	3 <i>Liberal</i>	Missing values
“What do you think is better for the country: A democracy that respects the rights of all persons or a dictatorship that guarantees economic progress even without respecting the rights of all persons.”*	9.9	3.7	86.4	21.4
Should gays participate in politics or not?**	43.5	2.0	54.5	7.7
Should indigenous people participate in politics or not?**	14.1	1.7	84.2	4.2
The government should intervene in decisions concerning one's wishes to associate with other persons?***	37.7	4.6	57.7	5.2
“Would you be willing to sacrifice freedom of expression in exchange for a life without economic pressures?”***	23.4	13.4	63.2	6.8
“Would you permit a person to get on television who will be saying things that contradict your way of thinking?”**	51.9	7.4	40.7	8.2

Source: Own calculations on the basis of ENCUP 2003, N = 4580.

\* Democracy (3), dictatorship (1)

\*\* No (1), in part (2), yes (3).

\*\*\* Yes (1), in part (2), no (3).

### **Freedom of Expression**

To capture the value citizens grant to freedom of expression we selected two survey items. Our first item asks whether interviewees are willing to see persons appear on TV who would be saying things that run counter to their personal way of thinking. This question seems to measure tolerance of dissent in a neat way. As shown in Table 3, an astonishing (as well as worrisome) majority of citizens object to the public expression of diverging opinions (51.9 percent), while two-fifths support the liberal position of tolerating dissenting voices (40.7 percent). Our second item asks whether respondents would be “willing to sacrifice freedom of expression in exchange for a life without economic pressures.” Almost two-thirds resist the

temptation to renounce basic rights in the name of material security (63.2 percent). More than one-fifth, however, are inclined to accept the deal of food for freedom (23.4 percent).

At first sight, the two questions seem to tap one and the same dimension of liberal thought. Yet, intriguingly, simple averages show a glaring gap of more than 20 percentage points between defenders of ideological pluralism and defenders of freedom of expression. Their cross-tabulation reveals that about two fifths of valid responses reflect interestingly inconsistent postures. More than one-tenth of interviewees (13.6 percent) rate economic security higher than freedom of expression, but still tolerate pluralism of opinion in television. More startlingly, another 31.6 percent indicate they value freedom of expression higher than economic security, but still reject the idea of watching diverging views on the evening news. This simple cross-tabulation provides a first hint at possible inconsistencies in the ideological outlooks of citizens, as measured by our indicators of liberalism.

### ***Political Equality***

The democratic principle of equality demands the guarantee of equal rights of participation to all citizens. With rather narrow and well-defined exceptions (children, psychiatric patients, and convicted felons), all exclusions from the democratic process are illegitimate. We take attitudes towards the political inclusion of gays and indigenous people as indicators of citizen respect for equal rights of political participation. ENCUP 2003 contains a broader set of items that ask interviewees whether, in their opinion, certain societal groups “should or should not participate in politics.” The list of candidates for exclusion is large and rather strange. It covers journalists, priests, teachers, business people, military officers, artists, professionals, the young, women, indigenous people, and gays.

Potential reasons for excluding these categories of citizens from the political arena seem to vary from group to group. Broadly speaking, we may distinguish between two classes of political motives: the desire to insulate the political sphere from outside interference (by religious authorities, the military, and big money); and the inverse desire to protect non-political spheres (like schools and the media) from political interference. By contrast, social prejudices may drive demands for excluding ascriptive groups: indigenous people (racism), gays (homophobia), women (machismo), and young people (perhaps judged to be immature). The possible grounds for banning professionals and artists from the art of politics remain in the dark.

Given the wide variety of targets for political discrimination offered, we should expect to see certain variation in aggregate responses. As it turns out, average levels of tolerance do indeed vary significantly across categories. Unsurprisingly, over 80 percent of respondents wish to see women, young people, professionals, and indigenous people taking part in politics. In contrast, substantial portions opt for excluding business people (24.8 percent), school teachers (32.3 percent), journalists (32.5 percent), military officers (44.8 percent), homosexual persons (43.5 percent), artists (55.4 percent), and priests (77.4 percent).<sup>23</sup> From among these diverse targets of social and political discrimination, we selected gays and indigenous people. Tolerating, or even demanding, the political exclusion of either group reveals normative dispositions that are fundamentally at odds with the liberal-democratic principle of equality.

### ***Inter-Item Consistency***

Our five indicators of liberalism seem to tap citizen attitudes towards fundamental liberal-democratic rights in ways that are neither trivial nor redundant. In order to obtain a rough idea of attitude consistency among our measures of liberalism, as well as between them and our measure of democratic support, we computed bivariate correlations. A quick glance at Pearson’s correlation coefficients, presented in Table 4, seems to confirm our initial intuition. Most correlations are highly significant (at the 0.01 level), reflecting at least a minimal degree of coherence between the six variables. After all, they are supposed to measure one broad underlying dimension, support for liberal democracy. However, correlation

**Table 4: Levels of Inter-Item Consistency: Bivariate Correlations**

		Gay Participation	Indigenous Participation	Freedom of organization	Freedom of expression	Pluralism of opinion in TV	Democracy versus dictatorship
Gay participation	Pearson Correlation	1	** .380	-.011	** .058	** .125	.006
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.471	.000	.000	.724
	N	4228	4179	4091	4025	3972	3417
Indigenous participation	Pearson Correlation	** .380	1	** .064	** .069	** .073	** .046
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000	.000	.007
	N	4179	4389	4219	4143	4085	3517
Freedom of organization	Pearson Correlation	-.011	** .064	1	** .070	-.001	* .039
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.471	.000	.	.000	.966	.021
	N	4091	4219	4340	4111	4058	3493
Freedom of expression	Pearson Correlation	** .058	** .069	** .070	1	** .058	** .060
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.	.000	.000
	N	4025	4143	4111	4269	4006	3453
Pluralism of opinion in TV	Pearson Correlation	** .125	** .073	-.001	** .058	1	-.015
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.966	.000	.	.392
	N	3972	4085	4058	4006	4205	3436
Democracy versus dictatorship	Pearson Correlation	.006	** .046	* .039	** .060	-.015	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.724	.007	.021	.000	.392	.
	N	3417	3517	3493	3453	3436	3601

*Note: Cells show bivariate correlation coefficients (Pearson).*

**\*\*** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**\*** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

coefficients are almost uniformly low. Some are not even statistically significant, and two show negative signs, which is entirely counterintuitive.<sup>24</sup>

The only item for which correlations are consistently positive and significant is freedom of expression. By contrast, it is startling to see freedom of organizations to be negatively correlated with pluralism in TV, gay participation, and indigenous participation (even if only the last correlation is significant). It seems that the desire to keep the government from interfering in citizens' associational life is unrelated (or even negatively related) to the wish to keep the public arena open to everyone. The message to their government seems to be: don't meddle with our business – but protect our closed shop. Our direct measure of democratic support, too, relates only loosely to our measures of liberalism. For example, whether citizens give priority to democratic rights over economic performance has nothing to do with their respect either for the political rights of homosexuals or for the freedom of expression of those who happen to entertain diverging opinions.

The imperfect fit between our measures of democratic support and liberal values suggests that simple binary classifications of respondents – as either supportive of or hostile to liberal-democratic values – will fail to capture the existing complexity of attitudinal configurations. In the next step, we employ cluster analysis to obtain a more precise picture of citizens' ideological profiles.

### **Mapping Democratic Support and Illiberal Values**

Cluster analysis is the generic name for a well-established group of statistical techniques that serve to classify cases that vary along multiple dimensions. In various ways, cluster analyses create groups of cases that are similar (numerically proximate) with each group, and dissimilar (numerically distant) between groups. This constitutes an “inductive” technique of classification that does not prejudge *a priori* either the weight of any of the variables introduced (unless we decide to weight them from the outset) or the particular profiles of the groups. Given our generic theoretical expectation of group heterogeneity (even if we don't know anything yet about their specific profiles), cluster analysis seems to be a congenial technique for sorting the large number of cases (respondents) typically included in representative opinion surveys.

Note that our following examination of the Mexican ENCUP 2003 excludes all respondents who failed to give valid answers to all six questions (cases with a missing value on any of the six items). Accordingly, our analysis does not tell us anything about people who failed to formulate their preferences towards our complete set of indicators. Above all, it does not tell us anything about the attitudinal configurations of the 21.4 percent of respondents who refused to give “valid” answers to our direct measure of democratic support, the hypothetical choice between democracy and developmental dictatorship. Overall, our cluster analysis includes 3099 cases, which amounts to a bit over two-thirds of the total number of 4580 respondents ENCUP 2003 includes (67.6 percent).

To classify our cases (respondents), we employed agglomerative, hierarchical cluster analysis according to Ward, a technique well-suited to maximizing intra-group similarity as well as inter-group dissimilarity.<sup>25</sup> In order to prevent individual clusters from becoming too small, we settled on a six-cluster solution in which each individual group still contains more than 10 percent of all cases. Even more importantly, the six clusters display configurations of attitudes that are nicely distinctive and make sense in substantive terms. Table 5 shows the mean values each of the six groups obtained for our six indicators. Given the way we coded all variables, the minimum value of 1 always corresponds to authoritarian or illiberal responses, the intermediate value of 2 to ambiguous answers, and the maximum value of 3 to democratic or liberal responses (see Table 3 and note 17). Bold characters highlight the extreme values of each variable (column).<sup>26</sup>

**Table 5: Configurations of Illiberalism and Support for Democracy: Cluster Means**

#	Clusters	N	%	1 Gay participation	2 Indigenous participation	3 Freedom of organization	4 Freedom of expression	5 Pluralism of opinion in TV	6 Democracy versus dictatorship
<b>1</b>	Liberal democrats	422	13.6	Mean Std. Dev.	<b>3.00</b> .00	<b>3.00</b> .00	<b>2.55</b> .74	<b>3.00</b> .00	<b>3.00</b> .00
<b>2</b>	Intolerant democrats	447	14.4	Mean Std. Dev.	<b>3.00</b> .00	2.98 .13	2.46 .83	<b>1.11</b> .31	2.99 .09
<b>3</b>	Paternalistic democrats	584	18.8	Mean Std. Dev.	<b>3.00</b> .00	<b>1.09</b> .29	2.37 .85	2.04 .97	2.99 .08
<b>4</b>	Homophobic democrats	874	28.2	Mean Std. Dev.	<b>1.05</b> .21	2.19 .95	2.37 .85	1.84 .95	2.97 .20
<b>5</b>	Exclusionary democrats	387	12.4	Mean Std. Dev.	1.28 .68	<b>2.27</b> .94	<b>2.27</b> .88	1.69 .90	2.95 .26
<b>6</b>	Ambivalent non-democrats	385	12.4	Mean Std. Dev.	2.20 .97	2.10 .96	2.28 .89	1.91 .95	<b>1.21</b> .40
<b>Total</b>	Ambivalent democrats	3099	100	Mean Std. Dev.	2.13 .98	2.20 .95	2.38 .85	1.92 .96	2.76 .62

*Note: Ward's method for agglomerative hierarchical cluster analysis. Squared Euclidian distances, unweighted variables.*

*Figures in bold highlight maximum and minimum values.*

Table 6 reduces the same data to three simple categories. With respect to our five indicators of political liberalism, it distinguishes between liberal, ambiguous, and illiberal groups (columns 1–5). With respect to our direct indicator of democratic support, it distinguishes between democratic, ambiguous, and authoritarian groups (column 6). In all cases, our three-fold classification is based on identical cut-points: Groups with averages below 1.5 receive “negative” qualifications; we describe them as either illiberal or authoritarian. Groups with averages above 2.5 receive “positive” qualifications; we describe them as either liberal or democratic. Groups with intermediate means between 1.5 and 2.5 receive “neutral” marks; we describe them as ambivalent. Note that these categorical boundaries concede wide terrain to the intermediate category of “ambivalence,” while they involve a narrow delimitation of extreme categories. In Table 5, bold characters highlight negative extremes, those group averages that fall into the boxes of illiberalism or authoritarianism. To a certain extent, the numbers and categories shown in Tables 5 and 6 “speak for themselves.” Let us nevertheless briefly highlight the distinctive traits of each cluster.

### ***Liberal Democrats***

On average, all groups, except the very last one, are “democratic” insofar as they express clear overt preferences for democracy. In an almost unanimous fashion, they resist the temptation to trade democratic rights for economic security under dictatorship (see column 6). Yet, only the first cluster corresponds to the idea of “liberal democrats” in a consistent fashion. This group is unanimous (!) in its direct support for democracy as well as in its support of four out of our five questions on liberal values. Group averages coincide with the maximum values of 3. It is only with respect to freedom of expression (as weighted against material welfare) that group members abandon their neat consensus. Yet, among all clusters, they still show the highest level of support for this freedom. Cluster 1 is the only group that qualifies as “liberal” in this dimension. Tellingly, consistent democrats represent no more than one-eighth of the entire sample (13.6 percent).

### ***Intolerant Democrats***

In terms of the breadth of their liberal-democratic convictions, the group contiguous to liberal democrats of cluster 1 are the “intolerant democrats” of cluster 2. In fact, these two clusters are hardly distinguishable from each other on all variables except one: their tolerance towards dissenting views in the public space. In contrast to its almost perfectly liberal profile on all other variables, this group looks almost perfectly illiberal in its unwavering rejection of ideological pluralism in the mass media (column 5). The acute aversion to dissenting opinion this group of democrats exhibit confirms the “paradox of political tolerance” James Gibson formulated about a decade ago. It confirms that “only a tenuous connection” may exist between support for democracy and political tolerance (Gibson, 1993: 7 and 10).

Note that the small cluster of “intolerant democrats” (14.4 percent) represent only a fragment of the overall majority of citizens who share the same aversion against the public expression of dissent (51.9 percent). Yet, most groups (except the cluster of consistent democrats) contain “ambivalent” mixes of tolerant and intolerant citizens. The dispersion of intolerant citizens across various groups thus dilutes their presence, despite constituting a majority in the overall sample.

### ***Paternalistic Democrats***

The next democratic group are the “paternalistic democrats” of cluster 3. They are liberal in their consistent respect for political equality, expressing unanimous support for gay and indigenous participation (mean = 3.0). Yet, they are ambiguous in the relative importance they attribute to freedom of expression (column 4) as well as in their attitudes towards dissenting views appearing on their television screens (column 5). They earn the label of “paternalistic” because of their illiberal stance towards freedom of organization (column 3). Almost without fissures, they concur that government should interfere when citizens wish to organize (mean = 1.09). It seems that this group, while open to the political involvement of everyone, wishes to put cautionary limits on political participation through governmental tutelage of civil society and the media.



*Table 6: Illiberalism and Democratic Support: Citizen Profiles*

#	Clusters	%	1 Gay participation	2 Indigenous participation	3 Freedom of organization	4 Freedom of expression	5 Pluralism of thought in TV	6 Democracy versus dictatorship
1	Liberal democrats	13.6	liberal	liberal	liberal	liberal	liberal	democratic
2	Intolerant democrats	14.4	liberal	liberal	liberal	ambivalent	<b>illiberal</b>	democratic
3	Paternalistic democrats	18.8	liberal	liberal	<b>illiberal</b>	ambivalent	ambivalent	democratic
4	Homophobic democrats	28.2	<b>illiberal</b>	liberal	ambivalent	ambivalent	ambivalent	democratic
5	Exclusionary democrats	12.4	<b>illiberal</b>	<b>illiberal</b>	ambivalent	ambivalent	ambivalent	democratic
6	Ambivalent non-democrats	12.4	ambivalent	liberal	ambivalent	ambivalent	ambivalent	<b>authoritarian</b>
<b>All</b>	Total: Ambivalent democrats	100.0	ambivalent	liberal	ambivalent	ambivalent	ambivalent	democratic
<hr/>								
1-1.5	<i>illiberal / authoritarian</i>							
1.5-2.5	<i>ambivalent</i>							
2.5-3	<i>liberal / democratic</i>							

### ***Homophobic Democrats***

Supportive of democracy, inclusionary towards indigenous people, ambivalent towards the freedoms of association and expression, but, above all, openly discriminatory towards gays, advocating the cancellation of their citizenship rights – this is the attitudinal profile of “homophobic democrats” grouped together in cluster 4. Their willingness to act upon their social prejudices and send a whole category of citizens into political exile, hand in hand with their manifest indifference towards basic liberties, reveals a group of shallow liberal-democratic persuasion. If Ronald Inglehart is right and “tolerance of homosexuality is a [strong] predictor of stable democracy” (2003: 54), we may find it worrisome that homophobic democrats represents the most populous group, representing well over one-quarter of the survey sample (28.2 percent).

### ***Exclusionary Democrats***

Interviewees sorted into cluster 5 show an ideological profile very similar to the preceding cluster 4. Even if they choose democracy over dictatorship, their commitment to political liberties appears to be superficial at best. Yet, deepening the discriminatory thrust of homophobic democrats, this group wishes to extend the denial of citizenship rights to indigenous groups as well. No other cluster adopts a position that would come even remotely close to this group of “exclusionary democrats.” Of the overall survey sample, only 14.1 percent favoured the exclusion of indigenous people from the political arena, while 84.2 percent supported their inclusion. As the cluster of exclusionary democrats represents 12.4 percent of all cases included in our cluster analysis, it seems to unite almost all racists prone to turn their prejudices into policies of exclusion. The close nexus between racism and homophobia that this group reveals comes as no surprise. It is a matter of democratic concern, however, that the two discriminatory groups, 4 and 5, together represent about two-fifths of the sample (40.6 percent).

### ***Ambivalent Non-Democrats***

Cluster 6, our one and only group of “authoritarian” citizens, assembles those respondents who give priority to economic progress, even at the expense of democratic rights (column 6). While instrumental in their attitude towards democratic governance, they are “tolerant” towards the political participation of indigenous people, and ambivalent on all other variables. In a way, this is good news. Those citizens who prefer the economic efficacy of dictatorship to the political efficacy of democracy do not display a consistently illiberal profile. Rather than posturing as hard core autocrats, as overt advocates of illiberalism, they show a pattern of relative indifference, speckled with some dots of liberalism.

### **Conclusion**

Standard survey questions that ask in a direct and generic manner whether respondents prefer democracy to non-democratic regimes tend to generate more puzzles than they resolve. Since they do not tell us anything about underlying democratic concepts and values, they do not tell us to what extent people who express a generic “preference for democracy” are actually committed to liberal-democratic ideas and institutions. The substantive indeterminacy of standard questions on democratic preferences has led some authors to conclude that “it is not useful to ask if people support [democracy] in abstract.”<sup>27</sup> The present paper, by contrast, vindicates the usefulness of such direct and abstract questionnaire items. Yet it argues that while we should keep asking such questions, we must introduce and interpret them in conjunction with more indirect and concrete questions on democratic ideas and ideals. Rather than resigning ourselves to the meaninglessness of overt democratic support, we should strive to uncover its structure of meaning by reading it in the context of individual attitudes towards more specific components of liberal democracy, be they conceptual, institutional, or normative.

By linking direct and indirect measures of democratic support we expected to find complex and possibly inconsistent configurations of democratic and non-democratic attitudes. The identification of “democrats with adjectives” through the statistical technique of cluster analysis seemed to be a promising way of

ordering the large numbers of cases without prejudging either the number of distinctive groups or their attitudinal profiles. Our analysis of the 2003 Mexican National Survey on Political Culture bore out this promise.

Future applications of cluster analysis in comparative public opinion research on democratic support face three major tasks: a) improving our descriptive inferences by incorporating additional variables; b) exploring the origins of different attitudinal configurations; and c) tracing their consequences. We can draw fuller portraits of citizens' democratic ideas and ideals by analyzing a broader range of plausible democratic conceptions and commitments, not restricted to a particular set of liberal values. We can explore the origins of different attitudinal profiles by examining their socio-economic correlates, such as sex, age, income and education. And we can study the consequences of citizens' ideological profiles by examining levels of support different groups show for political regimes, political institutions, and public policies.

Yet even our present, more limited exercise allows us to shed fresh light on the ideological landscape of contemporary democratic Mexico. By combining a direct question on democratic preferences with more indirect questions on liberal-democratic principles (freedom of expression, freedom of association, and political equality), we are able to draw a portrait of Mexican citizens that is much more nuanced, and much more interesting, than common descriptions derived from either single indicators or multiple but separate measures of aggregate democratic support. Contrary to theoretical expectations of ideological coherence – although possibly in accord with psychological common sense – inconsistency carries the day. The bad news is that most democratic supporters, excepting the small group of liberal democrats, manifest illiberal convictions in at least one dimension. The good news is that the few who flirt with authoritarian governance are not consistent either. Theirs is a mix of normative indifference with instrumental calculations.

The overall picture speaks of citizens who claim democratic rights and liberties for themselves, but are ready to deny them to others. Embracing democracy as an abstract ideal, they are still willing to banish dissenting voices or disliked groups from the public sphere. Since the specific targets of intolerance vary among the different clusters of “illiberal democrats,” they may find it difficult to translate their non-democratic impulses into political action. Yet citizens who conceive of democratic rights as private privileges, rather than as universal guarantees, may be willing to tolerate the erosion of political rights and civil liberties as long as they themselves feel well protected. Broadly speaking, our results lend credence to the idea that popular attitudes in Latin America may be “more conducive to illiberal than to liberal democracy” (Smith, 2005: chapter 11.6). Yet much research needs to be done before we can know how exceptional, or how generalizable, our findings are.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The *locus classicus* is Easton (1965). Among many contemporary texts, see Agh (1996), Chu, Diamond y Shi (2001), Dalton (2004), Diamond (1999), Inglehart (2000 and 2003), Lagos (2003b), Linz and Stepan (1996), Rose et al. (1998).

<sup>2</sup> For some sceptical voices, see Burton, Gunther, and Higley (1992), Pevehouse (2002), and Przeworski (1991 and 2003: 119).

<sup>3</sup> Even if we are cautious to enter the study of democratic support with sweeping claims of causal relevance, our motivating intuitions do tell us that citizen attitudes matter. Their private attitudes, as measured in public opinion surveys, may not bear direct consequences for democratic survival. Yet, at the very least, through their influence on electoral behaviour, they are likely to shape the qualities of democracy in multiple ways.

<sup>4</sup> For precise wordings, see the webpages of these cross-national surveys: World Values Survey ([www.worldvaluessurvey.org](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org)); Globalbarometer ([www.globalbarometer.org](http://www.globalbarometer.org)), with links to the regional Barometers.

<sup>5</sup> The notion of “questionnaire democrats” is Russell Dalton’s (1994).

<sup>6</sup> On the public falsification of private preferences, see Kuran (1995).

<sup>7</sup> Canache et al. were passing judgement on another standard item of survey research: satisfaction with democracy (2001).

<sup>8</sup> See also Gibson and Duch (1993). Gibson measures “political tolerance” as the disposition to include “least liked” social groups into the political process. The list of groups from which respondents are invited to nominate their “most disliked” ones includes two fundamentally different categories: It includes cultural minorities like Jews and homosexuals as well as anti-system groups, like neo-Nazis, Stalinists, and “supporters of cancelling elections and introducing military dictatorship” (citing from the list for the USSR in 1990, see Gibson and Dutch 1993: 299). While it is hardly controversial that racism and anti-Semitism do not provide legitimate grounds to exclude anyone from the political process, both in political theory and in practical politics, we have seen long debates about the legitimacy of democracies excluding the enemies of democracy (particularly if they turn violent). Our measures of political tolerance should make allowance for such self-protective democratic “intolerance against the intolerants.”

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Ai Camp (2001: 15–20), Bratton (2002 and 2004), Bratton and Mattes (2001: 453–7), Fuchs (1999), Gibson (2004: 19), Inglehart and Welzel (2004), Lagos (2003b: 471), Norris (1999: 11), Seligson (2001 and 2004: 12), Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer (1998), Westle (2003).

<sup>10</sup> Compare, for example, Afrobarometer: “what comes to your mind” when you hear the word democracy, with ENCUP: “which is the difference” between democracy and authoritarianism. The former seems to engage respondents in an exercise of brainstorming, the latter in the testing of political competence.

<sup>11</sup> Miller et al. (1997) is a laudable example of methodological clarity in the coding of their open-ended questions on democratic conceptions.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Lagos (2003a, 2003b, and 2001), Lewis (2003), Hofferbert and Klingemann (1999), Smith (2005: Chapter 11), Waldron-Moore (1999), and Zovatto (2002). Granted, non-academic consumers of survey research are much more vulnerable to interpretative simplifications. See, for example, “Democracy’s low-level equilibrium,” *The Economist* (12 August 2004), “The stubborn survival of frustrated democrats,” *The Economist* (30 October 2003), “Bienvenidos al Observatorio Electoral Latinoamericano,” *Observatorio Electoral Latinoamericano* (1 November 2004), and “Democracy SA: South Africans near the top of World ‘Democracy log’,” *Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa* (2 March 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Timothy J. Power, personal communication, 29 September 2004.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Gibson and Duch (1993), Miller et al. (1997: 176), UNDP (1994), Westle (2003). For a critique, see Miller et al. (1997: 159).

<sup>15</sup> For example, Booth and Seligson (2004), Gibson (1996), Gibson and Duch (1993), Moreno and Méndez (2002), Seligson and Carrión (2002: 67) (albeit mixing normative and evaluative items) employ factor analysis. Moreno (2001) and Hofman (2004) employ additive aggregation. For a critique of additive aggregation without theoretical guidance, as often practiced in the measurement of democracy, see Munck and Verkuilen (2002).

<sup>16</sup> On democracy’s multidimensionality, see, for example, Munck and Verkuilen (2002). For a widely-discussed proposal of thinking democracy as the confluence of three traditions, majoritarian, liberal, and republican, see O’Donnell (1999).

<sup>17</sup> The survey was commissioned by the Secretary of the Interior (SEGOB, Secretaría de Gobernación). Individual-level data, as well as technical documentation, are publicly accessible at [www.segob.gob.mx](http://www.segob.gob.mx). The questions were designed by SEGOB, while sampling and interviewing was conducted by the National Institute for Statistics and Geographical Information (INEGI). The sample was stratified by socio-economic levels and rural-urban residence.

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Respondents were randomly chosen among “habitual residents” above age 18 of the households selected. Reported margins of error lie at 5.2 percent (Segob 2003: 3). For fuller information on sampling and interviewing, follow the links Encuesta Nacional de Cultura Política y Prácticas Ciudadanas / Encup 2003 / Documentación, at [www.segob.gob.mx](http://www.segob.gob.mx).

<sup>18</sup> The quotation is from Smith (2005: Chapter 11.2).

<sup>19</sup> See also Almond and Verba (1963), Booth and Seligson (1984 and 1994), and Craig and Cornelius (1980). More optimistic assessments are Domínguez and McCann (1996), McCann and Domínguez (1998), and Durand Ponte (2004). Foley (1998) and Moreno and Méndez (2002) represent more critical views.

<sup>20</sup> Note that the Latinobarometer question on regime preferences offers an intermediate category that allows respondents to express their indifference between regime types. ENCUP, by contrast, only allows for “spontaneous” assertions of “partial” agreement or disagreement. In our statistical analysis, as mentioned above (note 17), we coded these spontaneous offers of “partial” agreement as intermediate category.

<sup>21</sup> All ENCUP questions included in our analysis ask respondents either to agree or disagree, admitting the possibility of “spontaneous” indications of “partial” agreement or disagreement. We recoded all items by assigning a score of 1 to illiberal answers, and a score of 3 to liberal responses. We understood spontaneous offers of “partial” agreement or disagreement as intermediate categories, receiving a score 2 (see also Table 2). All translations of survey items are ours.

<sup>22</sup> Authors’ calculations on the basis of ENCUP 2003.

<sup>23</sup> Authors’ calculations on the basis of ENCUP 2003. Percentages of valid answers. DK/NR responses lay between 2.5 percent (women) and 7.7 percent (gays).

<sup>24</sup> Note that we coded “authoritarian” or “illiberal” responses as 1, “partial” agreements or disagreements as 2, and “democratic” or “liberal” responses as 3. Higher values thus are indicative of more liberal, lower of less liberal attitudes (see also Note 21 and Table 2).

<sup>25</sup> As proximity measure, we use squared Euclidian distances. Variables are unweighted. All results were produced by SPSS for Windows 11.5. For a brief comparative discussion of Ward’s method, see Everitt, Landau, and Leese (2001: 59–64). Useful introductions into cluster analyses are Aldenderfer and Blashfield (1984) and Bailey (1994).

<sup>26</sup> Admitting a larger number of clusters would have allowed us to eliminate some ambiguities within groups and draw some finer distinctions between them. For instance, a seven-cluster solution would have involved a further partition of the group we describe as “homophobic democrats.” About one quarter of them show neatly liberal attitudes towards governmental intervention in television as well as towards the admission of dissenting voices on television. The rest tends towards the illiberal pole on both indicators. While interesting, these additional distinctions do not add much to our present purpose of illustrating the usefulness of cluster analysis for the measurement of liberal-democratic attitudes.

<sup>27</sup> Bratton and Mattes (2001b: 457). See also Seligson (2004).